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SUBJECT: CODEL ROHRABACHER DISCUSSES PEACE PROCESS,  
REGIONAL SECURITY WITH ISRAELI LEADERS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Luis G. Moreno for reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

11. (C) Summary. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) visited Israel August 19-21 for a series of meetings with Israeli officials, primarily focused on the peace process, regional security issues, and arms sales. Rohrabacher met with Minister of Strategic Affairs Moshe "Bogie" Ya'alon, Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, Advisor to Prime Minister Netanyahu Ron Dermer, and Ministry of Defense Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Mike Herzog. The Israelis expressed some pessimism about the willingness of the Palestinians to forge a lasting peace, but said they are prepared to do much to improve the well-being of Palestinians in the West Bank. Rohrabacher's interlocutors noted continued improvements in Palestinian security forces' performance and cooperation with Israel, while Herzog also noted improvement in Jordanian and Egyptian counterterrorism and countersmuggling operations. The unpopularity of the ruling regime in Iran prompted the Israelis to theorize about ways to take advantage of the situation, and they stressed Iran's destabilizing role in the region. Finally, Rohrabacher discussed Israeli technology transfers and arms sales practices, noting particular concerns about sales to China. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Accompanying Rohrabacher was House Foreign Affairs Committee staff member Paul Berkowitz and Rohrabacher staff member Fadi Essmaeel. PolCouns and Poloff accompanied them to their GOI meetings.

LOOKING FOR A PALESTINIAN PEACE PARTNER

13. (C) Rep. Rohrabacher and his Israeli interlocutors spent considerable time discussing the prospects for peace with the Palestinians. A key concern voiced by the Israelis was the Palestinian Authority's refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state "without using weaselwords," as Dermer explained. Ya'alon said the Netanyahu government's review of Israeli policy toward the Palestinians since the Oslo Agreements had reached the conclusion that the core issue was not Israeli settlements or territories occupied in 1967 but rather Palestinian refusal to come to terms with Israel's right to exist in any boundaries. Dermer and Ya'alon used almost identical wording when explaining that PA President Abbas views Judaism as a religion and not a nationality and refuses to accept the principle of "two states for two peoples", which they concluded means that Abbas does not believe the Jews are entitled to a state. Ya'alon and Dermer also expressed doubt that the Palestinians would be willing to declare an end of conflict and the relinquishment of all Palestinian claims following an agreement and would rather insist on re-opening issues after a peace accord was signed.

14. (C) Nonetheless, the Israelis were hopeful that progress could be made. Ayalon assured Rohrabacher that the Netanyahu government had a strong mandate and that the government's credibility would allow it to make significant compromises. Dermer stressed that Netanyahu's Bar Ilan speech represented a consensus policy in Israel. "This is the least divided Israelis have been for a long time," he explained. He added

that Netanyahu's recently announced support for a two-state solution (provided that the Palestinian state be demilitarized and subject to certain other limitations on its sovereignty) means that leaders from Israel's left, center, and right had now all crossed that "Rubicon," but he lamented that no Palestinian leader had done something comparable in terms of accepting the Jewish state. Ya'alon noted his strong support for Netanyahu's bottom-up approach to peace and stressed the importance of supporting moderates and demonstrating that the lives of average Palestinians will improve under this approach. He cautioned, however, that it would be a long process that might not reach a resolution for another 20 years.

#### REGIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS

15. (C) In response to Rohrabacher's question whether Israel would have to restructure its military forces following a peace agreement with the Palestinians, Herzog said that there would be some changes but that the prospect for peace seemed far off, making it difficult to provide such an assessment. He noted that one change already taking place was the removal of checkpoints in the West Bank. When Rohrabacher noted that a Palestinian official he had spoken with earlier that day claimed that no checkpoints had been removed, Herzog replied that 15 months ago there were 41 fixed checkpoints in the West Bank while now there are only 14.

16. (C) Herzog praised the performance of Palestinian security forces, calling them more professional and capable than they had been. He added that it was interesting that a key issue for HAMAS during Egyptian-sponsored reconciliation

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talks with Fatah was to terminate Lt. Gen. Dayton's program to train PA security forces. Despite the PASF's improvement and their success in restoring law and order, they have a long way to go to develop into a credible counter- terrorism force, however. Herzog added that the more the PA does, the less the Israelis have to do, noting the removal of a checkpoint near Qalqilya following a successful PA counterterrorism operation there.

17. (C) Rohrabacher then asked about regional cooperation against terrorism and smuggling. Herzog responded that the Jordanians are doing a good job, especially when it comes to any threats to their own country. The Egyptians were doing more than they had ever done in terms of counter- smuggling operations, with one key indicator being the rise in prices in Gaza. The Egyptians could do more, however, and they need constant encouragement, he explained.

#### IRAN IS THE BIG THREAT

18. (S) Ayalon noted that Iran is the region's major concern, as it pursues nuclear weapons but also undermines the whole region with its support for Hizballah, Islamic Jihad, and dissident groups in Jordan, Egypt, and the Gulf countries. Iran's attempts to be a hegemonic power are frightening to the Arabs, according to Ayalon. Herzog noted it was difficult to assess whether Iran would be a nuclear state in the next 12 months, as there were both technical and political elements to consider, along with questions about the existence or extent of Iranian clandestine efforts. Regardless, he said that the Iranians already have enough material for one device and that "we" should not act as if there is a lot of time. Both Herzog and Ya'alon assessed that the Iranian regime was highly unpopular at home, but Herzog said it is impossible to estimate how long it would survive. This unpopularity could provide an opportunity to isolate the regime and force it to choose between the desire to possess a nuclear weapons capacity or embark on a more moderate path that would help ensure its survival. Ya'alon added that Israel coordinates overtly and covertly with Sunni regimes against Iran, explaining that these regimes speak publicly against Israel, but privately against Iran.

CONCERNS ABOUT ARMS SALES

¶9. (S) Rohrabacher queried Herzog on Israeli policy regarding weapons sales to China, noting the risk that China - or countries to which China would re-export - could end up using those weapons or that weapons technology against Israel and the U.S. Herzog replied that Israel has not sold arms to China for several years following a disagreement with the U.S. over the sale of AWACS planes to China that Israel eventually scrapped. "We recognize American sensitivity on this subject." Rohrabacher also brought up his concerns about China to Ayalon, who replied that Israel had made this mistake once because it did not understand the gravity of the U.S. concerns, adding that as a result, new legislation was passed and the MFA was given a role in reviewing all arms sales in order to ensure that a similar problem would not arise. In response to a question whether other countries the U.S. was providing weapons to could pose a threat to Israel, Herzog replied that some elements of a proposed sale of F-15's to Saudi Arabia are "problematic" in that Israel does not have access to the same technology. He characterized Israel's concerns as not being the result of fears that Saudi Arabia would attack Israel, but that the sales were "precedent setting."

¶10. (U) CODEL Rohrabacher has cleared this cable.

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